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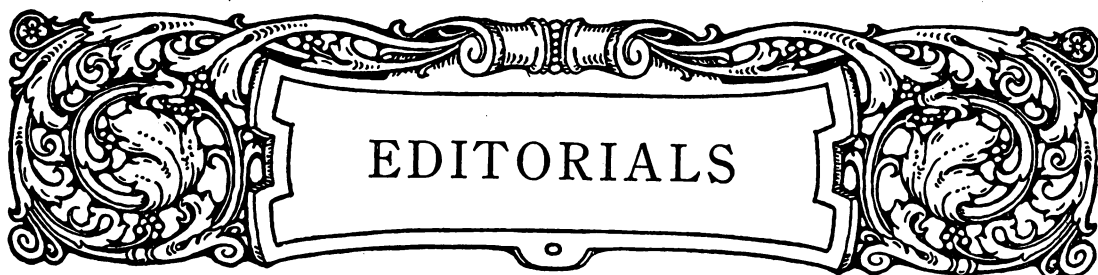
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## THE GOSPEL OF UGLINESS ACCORDING TO MEPHISTOPHELES

THE readers of THE ART WORLD may ask why I have chosen this channel of communication to the public instead of one of the publications devoted to my propaganda of degenerate art.

You probably know that I am an aristocrat. Formerly I moved in the highest circles and was entitled to a seat at the council of the Gods. As the result of a misunderstanding I was eliminated from the council. Owing to former associations I prefer good society, not always attainable among my propagandists. In fact I must confess to a certain measure of loathing for the unclean instruments I have heretofore employed.

Confiding in you, I will say that in this talk on art I am telling you the truth—impossible as it may seem! I can tell the truth when it suits my purpose. Of course I am known as the greatest liar in the universe, having been named "Father of Lies." Consequently, when I wish to impress the people in a way opposite the truth, I tell them the truth.

Many years ago there lived and sang in German a troubadour named Goethe. That was before Germany became obsessed with science. There were poets and musicians who sang of Loreleis and Rhine maidens and of a hero called Siegfried. This troubadour became interested in one of my adventures and wove it into a song quite as notable in some ways as Homer's story of Ulysses. This adventure was my journey with Faust. As the story runs, one eventful evening I appeared to Faust as a traveling scholar. He asked that I explain myself. I answered thus:

I am the spirit that denies  
And justly so: for all things from the Void  
Called forth, deserve to be destroyed.  
'Twere better, then, were naught created.  
Thus, all which you as Sin have rated—  
Destruction—ought with Evil blent—  
That is my proper element.

This is my creed and expresses in a concrete form my philosophy.

In my negation of the material world and my aversion to beauty and my worship of ugliness I move within a closed circle to a point of contact with Buddha and St. Francis. Note also that my chant expresses a sinister pessimism, which is one of my chief characteristics. Indeed, it were better that the human brood were never created than to be forever building card-houses to be knocked down, as they are doing now in Europe. However, as it is not possible to extinguish the race, I will aim to destroy the one thing that more than all else makes life attractive and worth living on this planet. I will negate beauty and establish the gospel of ugliness.

As the supreme exponent of negation I can only exist through opposition to the divine order of truth

and beauty. Therefore I will exercise all my powers to disturb the cosmic harmony. In past time my efforts to involve the world in total discord have failed, but at present, for the first time in history, I have almost arrived at a complete realization of my cherished ideals in the destruction of life and art—the world-wide negation of beauty and consequent worship of ugliness.

I am minded to transport myself to a peak in the Alps, and, viewing therefrom the slaughter and ruin of the nations, congratulate myself with a fiendish chuckle on my triumph over the three grand obsessions of the human race: religion, philosophy and science. In fact never before have I felt so powerful and so encouraged to press on to the attainment of absolute negation. I no longer masquerade as scholar, professor or priest, but stride over the world as *Utilitaria*, smiting the fair land of Europe with war and famine, and America with greed and Stygian ugliness. Thus, denying the cosmic trend toward beauty, I advance toward the ideal ugliness.

You mortals are on the wrong track; in the past you have looked for salvation to transcendentalism and philosophy, and now science. All three have failed you. But there is a certain cult which you have never fairly tried, at least not in modern times—the Cult of Beauty.

Being a generous devil and feeling measurably sure of success, I will amuse myself by telling you the secret of this cult, knowing perfectly well that you will not believe a word that I say. What I refer to is: the ideal of beauty which is the basic volition of your Cosmos or God.

Every object of material growth in the universe is perfect and beautiful in its varying scale of development—unless mutilated or disorganized by some one of the powers I employ to negate the divine order. The most elementary forms of life, dragged up from the bottom of the sea, are quickened through the Cosmic Volition toward beauty into balanced masses and rhythmic lines, and this volition continues in its ceaseless quest for beauty throughout the entire scale of creation upward to man.

This cosmic urge toward the ideal beauty is the voice of your God, uttering itself through matter in a definite trend or stream of tendency. And this is the one trend or stream of tendency throughout the kingdom of nature that you can prove to exist by actual demonstration—without any resort whatsoever to religion, philosophy or science. Such a demonstration forms also an impregnable standard of beauty. For all normal products of the creative mind are based upon the laws of proportion, rhythm and equilibrium, rising in their quality of beauty

in the ratio that they involve these fundamental laws.

Also this cult of the ideal beauty would furnish you with a workable definition of Morals, which you do not possess at the present time. That which makes for a realization of this ideal is moral, whatever presents an obstacle to its attainment is immoral.

Whenever I employ the agencies of negation, such as disease or violence, to disturb the normal development of nature, its character is at once changed to abnormal. The balanced masses become unbalanced, their proportion and rhythm at once become disorganized. Instead of beauty and harmony there is discord and ugliness.

You may ask why this element of negation is always present. I will tell you. It means conflict, without which the universe would sink into the stagnation of monotony which is death. Life means perpetual conflict with death. Whenever one of my agencies of negation disturbs the normal creative volition, whether in a human being or in a painting, it means death. My mission is to create disorder, and as Ruskin truly says "Death is the consummation of disorder."

As the supreme Spirit of Negation, I am at perpetual war with the creative cosmos. I win victories, but do not win the war.

The pestilent Greeks, with their ideal of beauty, have given me more trouble than all other races of mankind. Their ideal will not down. Roman brutality and materialism were to some extent leavened by this ideal and it almost triumphed; but my importation of Oriental luxury and vice, together with the stagnation induced by ill-used wealth, paralyzed the Greek cult in Rome and destroyed it.

The breaking up of the Roman Empire completed what I thought to be a permanent success for my programme, but I discerned signs of a revival of the Greek cult which might have developed into an organized power to build a new civilization on the ruins of Rome.

Fortunately this menace to my plans was averted by the world becoming obsessed by progressive transcendentalism—with its *consciousness of guilt*. This consciousness of guilt, in the transcendental ascetic, is born of a belief that his *spirit is imprisoned in the flesh*—first physically and further mentally—*by everything that makes the material world attractive*. Therefore his first duty is to resist and deny the natural world. Buddha taught his disciples "that all beings were entangled in a web of passions; tossed upon the raging billows of a sea of ever-renewing existences; whirling in a vortex of endless miseries; tormented incessantly by the stings of concupiscence; sunk in a dark abyss of ignorance; the wretched victims of an illusory, unsubstantial and unreal world."

And he further says "that sentient existence is attached to matter. Matter is attached to moral evil. Moral evil is a thing to be extinguished. Therefore sentient existence is a thing to be extinguished."

Thus, according to the Buddhist ascetic, a man can only liberate his soul by purging himself of *all desire for existence*, on the material plane.

To do this, the first step is a negation of beauty; as beauty, aside from the instinct for procreation, is the most powerful element of attraction in the ma-

terial world. Thus the excessive transcendentalist finds his salvation in ugliness. The Hindoo fanatic mutilates himself on a bed of spikes and the Christian ascetic flagellates himself to purge away all desire for material existence. Both are tortured by a consciousness of the guilt and shame of souls held captive in the flesh by their original sin. To the transcendental ascetic removal from all contact with matter is the ultimate hope. The very body itself becomes an object of disgust.

Buddha lost no opportunity to despise the body. He said to his disciples in the Buddhist scriptures: to despise the body, to regard it as a mere illusion, without reality and subject to destruction; not only that it was like foam on the ocean and like a flame trembling in the wind; but that it was a mere receptacle of filth, a worm bred upon the dunghill full of disgusting secretions, a drain filled with offensive refuse, producing all kinds of pains and diseases, and being nothing but a cause for dissatisfaction and aversion. Therefore the uglier and more repulsive a human being, the more his aversion to the material life and the consequent added impulse toward Nirvana.

My object then is to create in the human being my First form of Negation:—An aversion to his own kind. This object is perfectly attained the moment the human being, through his environments, costumes and the destruction of health, becomes ugly.

It is not possible at this period to hypnotize western men and women to the extent of making them mutilate themselves like the Hindoos or the early Christians, but I have prompted them to attain the acme of ugliness in their dress, combined with an intense monotony and commonplaceness of their daily lives, to the extent that they regard the Greek Hermes as on an exact level, so far as actual appearance goes, with a degenerate cabaret dancer on Broadway.

The French Revolution with its worship of philosophy and the doctrine of "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" worked this change, and here we have the strange spectacle of a philosophy denying the whole fabric of revealed religion, meeting on a common ground the very transcendentalism it denies.

The patriots of the French Revolution invented the present costume which is a perfect corollary of scientific industrialism. Thus they unwittingly, urged on by me, inaugurated the greatest cycle of negation of beauty in the world's history.

I pride myself that transcendental obsession, in its different forms of excessivism, is my greatest achievement in my efforts to enslave and ruin the human race. So long as I can induce men and women to occupy themselves about the many varieties of occultism, spiritualism and transcendental speculation about the *future*, so long will they neglect the problems of the *present* and leave them unsolved. They stumble along and fall into the ditch I have dugged for them, when the secret of the magic of the only true occultism lies open before them. The Greeks arrived at the only true occultism—in their ideal of Beauty. There is more true occultism in the Venus de Milo or the Jupiter Otricoli than in all the seated Buddhas and sculptured Saints in the round world. There is more expression of the real soul of the universe in the ruins of the Parthenon

than in all other architecture in existence, for in the Parthenon, and not in the Pyramids or in the Cathedrals, is buried the secret of the universe, the solution of the Sphinx's riddle, the secret of the healing of the nations through Beauty, through harmony and peace without monotony.

The Second grewsome power in my sinister triad is the negation of—the Commonplace. Here I enter the domain of comedy! I crack jokes with Bottom and Snug-the-Joiner and whistle a roundelay with Marsyas, giving all hail to these jolly folk. At last they have come to their own.

In America my cult of the commonplace has, for the first time in history, attained the absolute. To some extent this is owing to my not being hampered by the historic environments and traditions of the Old World, but chiefly to the immolation of the people on Scientific Industrialism which, besides creating an environment of extreme ugliness, offers such rewards in material wealth and power that it seduces the best minds away from the arts and so leaves painting and sculpture and art criticism and poetry, with some noticeable exceptions, to the mental and moral deficients of the race. Scientific Industrialism with its monstrous environment induces a mechanical volition that passes for existence. From the resultant inferno of monotony you attempt to escape by invoking the jugglery of science to produce electric vaudeville, canned music and mental debaucheries in moving picture shows.

In the country your landscapes are polluted with a ghastly array of sign boards, proclaiming in strident color and line the glory of quack medicines and department stores. In the towns the windows contain posters. Every vacant space on walls or fence is covered with hideous pictorial abortions summoning people to spend money. The Elevated Railway and Subway stations are filled with figures of gigantic size wrestling in the throes of rheumatism or cholera morbus, or infants of elephantine proportions reaching for baby food. Inside the cars are rows of advertising signs in violent tones and harsh contrasts, the hard lines and flint-edged letters harassing your nerves like a knife thrust.

When night falls other horrors are forthcoming. When you enter Broadway at Columbus Circle you might well exclaim with Dante when he traversed my Inferno: "The banners of Hell's Monarch do come forth toward me." Flung out on the sable curtain of the night are gouts and jets of electric flame gashing and seaming the sky with frantic vociferations. The elemental forces evoked in the service of Mammon issue in symbols of noise, that, with strident discord, summon the four corners of the globe to the traffic in whiskey, chorus girls and automobiles.

You see then how the reign of science has become one of my chief powers in creating an environment of negation. I attach the greatest importance to the effect of environment, especially on the minds of children. One of my pet hobbies is the colored sheets in the Sunday supplements. These contain the very acme of a hideous negation of form and color, combined with a low vulgarity and degradation of the English language. The effect of these villainous illustrations and the accompanying slang on the minds of the young is far-reaching and

permanent, and prepare their receptive minds for another phase of my propaganda later on.

Another feature that pleases me is that on the adjoining pages of the Sunday newspapers may be found columns of emasculated homilies about morality, efficiency and fervid exhortations to temperance. Such influences as I have indicated also have a baleful prenatal effect on unborn children, in an ever-increasing ratio in succeeding generations, resulting in a subconscious negation of form and color that is obviously reflected in some of the current exhibitions of painting and sculpture.

Taken as a whole, the salient characteristic of many of the art exhibitions is that they are stupid and ugly. So far they are not obscenely vulgar as are often the exhibitions of neurotic art in Europe, but they are deadly commonplace and dull. Some of the work of this kind is well done, the artists meeting the requirements of a mechanical technique, evidencing what one writer aptly terms the "thoroughness of mediocrity." But my cult of the commonplace and ugly has so lowered your standard of art that shoals of mediocre minds have taken up painting and sculpture—many of them of the mental calibre of unskilled laborers, without the intelligence to become skilled mechanics, electricians or engineers. They might be useful in the avocations of simple labor as dish-washers and ditch-diggers, but they have turned to the arts with exactly the same results that followed the efforts of the players before Theseus in "The Mid-Summer Night's Dream"—with this difference, that Starveling and Snug and Bottom were taken as a huge joke by Theseus and his Court, whereas the present Starvelings and Snugs and Bottoms are taken seriously and almost dominate the whole fabric of æsthetics in America.

Then I have reversed the old Greek fable of Marsyas—Marsyas, a relative of mine, an uncouth, commonplace Satyr who attempted to compete in poetry with Apollo, the God of Art and Light. Being vanquished, Marsyas was condemned by Apollo to be flayed alive for his impudence and failure, notwithstanding the verdict of the jury in the favor of Marsyas.

At present you will note the complete reversal of the ancient fable. Marsyas now flays Apollo. Marsyas has now come into his own; in fact some of the current art exhibits on Fifth Avenue might aptly be termed "The Revenge of Marsyas."

The Third form of my triad of Negations is to be found in the peculiar manifestation of the "modernistic" neurotic cult of art expressed chiefly through the medium of sculpture, painting and poetry. My partiality for this special cult is the proof of my æsthetic taste. Its propaganda has steadily developed since the days of Baudelaire, who was the prophet of the cult. I have seen it grow in Paris, spread to London, Berlin and other centers of taste and culture in Europe, and am encouraged to believe that my cult of degenerate art may soon get a foothold in America.

You may have observed that the French have been the torch bearers in æsthetic culture in modern times. What the Greeks were in the fifth century before Christ and the Italians in the sixteenth century, the French were in the nineteenth century. They possess the plastic instinct or sense of form in a much higher degree than any other modern

race. They were the leaders and teachers of the nations in æsthetic ideals. I pride myself that it is no small triumph to have hatched my cult of sexual degeneracy expressed through the arts on this modern altar of the Temple of Art.

In the war of 1870 the French nation threw off the incubus of Napoleon's corrupt régime, thus gaining a greater victory than if they had vanquished the Germans. Then in the seventies and eighties they developed a cycle of art equal in splendor of achievement to the Italian Renaissance in both sculpture and painting. But during that time, in subterranean ways, my propaganda went on. Step by step I have gained, to the extent that now in the capitals of Europe my modernistic cult is organized. The nature of my propaganda is put forth in *éditions de luxe* and my pamphlets and art dodgers have reached even to America. Sexual neurosis or perversion has existed in all historical periods, but the present is the first time in history that it developed an organized cult in letters and the plastic arts. My devotees of this cult all agree on one point, irrespective of their different trends: they all unite by unanimous consent in a common worship of ugliness. Their test or standard of highest excellence in art is to achieve the intensest possible negation of form and proportion, and the greatest conceivable ugliness, coupled with symbolic suggestions of sexomania in pictures, statuary or alleged poetry. There is a well-defined cabalistic code of sign language employed, whereby initiates can understand and experience the sensations conveyed.

It is well understood by alienists that many people who have an insane diathesis may live and die normally, if during their lifetime no specific condition arises that fans the latent spark of insanity into flame. The same may be said of those who have a dormant tendency toward sex perversion. Ordinarily the police prevent developments of conditions favorable to this tendency, but the degenerates have seized upon the arts as a *medium* for the expression of their peculiar mania; instead of making indecent exposures in the public parks and thereby receiving a term in the penitentiary, they effect their purpose by exhibiting their art works in the public art galleries and in alleged poetry—and are lauded and eulogized by some of the art critics in the capitals of Europe! The effect of these exhibitions upon the youth of the country may well be imagined. Through the public exhibitions of their unclean symbols the degenerates present the conditions for spreading their cult among the young of both sexes.

The stigmata of degeneracy in modernistic art are most easily detected in the treatment of the nude. The nude human figure, wrought to a fine design with plastic power, marks the highest achievement in art. Likewise the blasphemous degradation of the nude figure, seen in the abominations perpetuated by European degenerates, marks the lowest stage of impotence and debasement in the arts.

The foundation of any right existence of æsthetic culture must rest upon a basis of correct appreciation of the power and beauty of the nude human figure. The public exhibitions of the atrocious and vulgar travesties of the nude by modernistic art degenerates of Europe can only create disgust and loathing in the minds of normal people and so operate to repel and prevent the advance of correct

æsthetic taste, thus playing directly into the hands of prudery and Puritanism.

The unfortunate victims of pathological sex-perversion can also be known by their preferences in art. In addition to their partiality for the neurotic cults they affect a taste for rude carvings of aboriginal races, especially if they suggest a certain obscene symbolism, united with a strain of devil-worship. They are fascinated by the union of the demoniacal and the obscene, which is one of my salient characteristics—as indicated in the account of my journey through the classic Walpurgis Night with Faust.

In the success of my modern propaganda of degeneracy in the capitals of Europe I owe much to the newspapers. In the days of Baudelaire and Verlaine a large number of people read books of poetry or philosophy. Now all that is changed. Most of the people read only the daily papers. In many of these my agents of propaganda operate, disguised as art critics, eulogizing the works and exhibits of neurotic art. It has been observed in Berlin and Paris that some of these critics are possessed of a sinister pessimism akin to my own.

This is often allied to a pathological diathesis towards sex-perversion. Consequently there is a voluntary response by these desperadoes of morbid sexomania to the works of sex perverts. These writers on art effect a strident clamor for modernistic art. They have, thanks to my prompting, gained a foothold in some respectable journals in Paris and London. I am looking forward to the time when I may be equally successful in some of your American papers. It may not be possible to accomplish this in America, for, once your people are aroused and made to clearly understand the significance and meaning of the neurotic cults in art, they will reject all attempts to transplant from Europe to America a pornographic cult from my centers of propaganda in Paris and London. Still, I will not be discouraged. I am quite certain that there are dealers who may be converted to my ideals, and you may yet see exhibitions on Fifth Avenue that will vie with those of Paris and London in presenting to your people, both young and old, examples of the symbolism of my cult of indecency.

Observers of some of the exhibitions of degenerate art in Europe have remarked on the peculiar character of many of the people who haunt such exhibitions. Also the effect of the pictures and statues on the young and old of both sexes—the subtle effect of the unclean symbols on some receptive mind, of a first sensation that digs deep into the secret recesses of the soul, releasing therefrom some atavistic monster that otherwise would have slept on unaroused.

You see I pursue my ideal through all the changes of the world's panorama, using my powers of negation to foil the plan of the cosmic volition. I would reduce the world to the condition of the Witch's Walpurgis Night on the Brocken, when I revealed to Faust my ideal of the ugly, the vulgar and the abominable, like the witch's dance in TamO'Shanter: the shapes arose of murder, disease, abortion and suffering. I was here in my element and reigned supreme in my kingdom of negation.

But according to my compact with Faust, I had to go with him through the classic Walpurgis Night

wherein I was to be tortured by a vision of the Greek ideal beauty. As we moved on, the forms of ancient art were revealed, through which Faust advanced toward his ideal beauty and I toward my ideal ugliness. In the Archaic art of the Egyptians and the Assyrians and the primitive art of Greece, with its griffins and centaurs, Faust discerned the struggle of art to rise from the animal to the human form, giving a prophesy of the future ideal beauty. He was exalted and stimulated to pursue this ideal.

On myself, who was forced by my compact to journey with him through these realms of the antique, the effect was exactly the reverse. I saw in the part-bestial forms of the sphinxes and griffins a beginning of the realization of my ideal of ugliness and experienced a partial relief from the agony of contemplating the pure Greek forms; and I soliloquized thus:

And as among these fires I wander, aimless,  
I find myself so strange, so disconcerted:  
Quite naked most, a few are only shirted—  
The Griffins insolent, the Sphinxes shameless.  
And what not all, with pinions and with tresses,  
Before, behind, upon one's eyesight presses!  
Indecency, 'tis true, is our ideal,  
But the Antique is too alive and real.  
One must with modern thought the thing bemaster,  
And in the fashion variously o'erplaster:  
Disgusting race! Yet I, perforce, must meet them  
And as new guest with due decorum greet them.

As we moved on through the world of antique art each one found something to his taste. Then we came to a most amazing revelation of the power of the Greek imagination. As we advanced, Faust toward his ideal of beauty, I toward my ideal ugliness, we came to the Sirens with their sharp talons. We saw Lilith, the female Vampire of the Hebrews; the Lamiae, the witches of the Greek imagination; Empusa, the cannibal witch with one cloven foot who called me cousin. I acknowledged the relationship and admired her deformity. We passed others symbolic of nature and the elements, and finally arrived at the place of the Phorkyads, of the three grey sisters. They each had in common but one eye and one tooth, which they used alternately. They dwelt at the uttermost ends of the earth where neither sun nor moon beheld them. They represent the climax of all which the Greek imagination has created of the horrible and repulsive. I was consequently ravished with delight. I had found the ideal ugliness.

As I, myself the embodiment of ugliness, stood before these daughters of chaos, I broke into song:

. . . . . I something see, and am dumbfounded!  
Proud as I am, I must confess the truth:  
I've never seen their like in sooth—  
Worse than our hags, an Ugliness unbounded!  
How can the Deadly Sins then ever be  
Found ugly in the least degree,  
When one this triple dread shall see?  
We would not suffer them to dwell  
Even at the dreariest door of Hell;  
They stir, they seem to scent my coming;  
Like vampire-bats they're squeaking, twittering, humming.

I then addressed them:

Most honored Dame! Approaching, by your leave,  
Grant that your triple blessing I receive.  
I come, though still unknown, yet, be it stated,  
If I mistake not, distantly related.  
Old, reverend Gods already did I see;  
To Ops and Rhea have I bowed the knee;  
The Parcae even—your sisters—yesterday  
Or day before, they came across my way;  
And yet the like of you ne'er met my sight:  
Silent am I, and ravished with delight.

I am amazed no poet has the sense  
To sing your praises!—Say, how can it be  
That we no pictures of your beauty see?  
Should not, through you, the chisel strive to wean us  
From shapes like those of Juno, Pallas, Venus?

My prayer has been answered by the modernistic degenerates in Art.

The astounding revelation to me was the range of the Greek mind invoking the absolute in the two opposite poles of the ideals of beauty and ugliness. I who had striven with all my powers and that of the fallen angels for the ideal of ugliness, was now confronted with a creation that eclipsed our utmost efforts. Here in the remotest ends of the earth, in eternal blackness of darkness, the Greek imagination placed the symbol of absolute negation, even as they had approached the ideal of absolute beauty, thus reaching the limit of the two opposing powers.

But they kept their ideal of ugliness chained in perpetual darkness. No expression in their art ever betrayed its existence, but this monster of negation stood on the threshold of every Greek imagination. Jupiter, Apollo and the Venus de Milo had gazed into the horror of it—on all the faces of their Gods and Heroes there is a trace of the haunting terror of that contact. You cannot imagine one of those visages of divine beauty breaking into a smile. With unfathomable, eternal repose they register their condemnation of ugliness and the triumph of their ideal beauty.

*Mephisto*

## THE HENRY CLAY FRICK COLLECTION

*See pages 375 and 376*

IS there something predestinate in certain sites? That section of Fifth Avenue, New York, which extends from Seventieth to Seventy-first Streets used to boast of the Lenox Library, the façade of which overlooked Central Park—a building thought by many judges of architecture the masterpiece of Richard M. Hunt. For that reason his memorial was placed directly opposite on the edge of park. The Lenox having been merged with the Astor and Tilden foundations to form the great public library

thirty streets farther south, Hunt's building was offered to the New York Historical Society but refused. The trustees feared the loss of identity which might result from the merger. Now the residence of Mr. Henry Clay Frick which took the place of the vanished Lenox has continued the tradition of a spot devoted to rare objects of the fine arts, if not of rare specimens of books. It contains one of the most remarkable assemblies of old paintings in the United States belonging to a private collector,